

THE RHODESIAN JOURNAL OF ECONOMICS

The Quarterly Journal of the Rhodesian Economic Society

Editorial Board:

A. M. Hawkins (Editor), R. J. Davies, J. A. C. Girdlestone, A. F. Hunt,
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THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT IN RHODESIA, 1910-1924

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One of the effects of the first World War was that circumstances became more favourable to artisan organisation, particularly on the railways, where the only permanent trade union in Rhodesia was formed by white employees in 1916. This was by no means the first attempt to form a union, but earlier efforts in various industries had usually proved ineffective and ephemeral. It has been pointed out by Gray that on average, the white working class in Rhodesia was paid substantially more than its equivalent in South Africa or Britain. As Arrighi has indicated, white labour had to be attracted to Rhodesia, and unlike South Africa, the white working class was a consequence of capitalist development and did not precede it, which meant that this class tended to be in a good bargaining position.¹ This initially undermined the need for formal organisation, which was further discouraged by the small scale of industries in the country; the railways were the only large employers of white labour. The war altered this situation in two important respects, the increased cost of living and loss of manpower. Employers failed to respond favourably to early demands by white workers, and the trade union movement was the result.

Rhodesia had not been completely untouched by labour movements before 1916, and it is interesting to note that these originated from black employees who were not placed in the same privileged position as the white workers, from whose status the Africans' deprivation stemmed. The first strike in the country was by black mine employees in 1895, and was followed by further strikes on mines in 1901 and 1906, organised usually by men accustomed to working for higher pay in South Africa and as a reaction against employers attempts to reduce overhead costs by cutting wages.² Despite these initial successes, no formal organisation for black labour emerged, although there were further instances of African strikes in 1912, 1919 and 1921. This failure to organise formally can be attributed to three major factors, the most significant of which was perhaps the close supervision exercised over black workers by means of the compound system. Secondly, only a small proportion of black employees worked on a long-term basis, and there was thus a high turnover of staff. Finally, since the vast majority were unskilled, and therefore easily replaced, there was no reply to victimisa-

* Formerly a research student in the Department of History, University of Rhodesia.
¹Gray, p.91-8, G. Arrighi, *The Political Economy of Rhodesia*, The Hague, Mouton, 1967, pp.21-6.

²I. R. Phimister, 'The Shamva Mine Strike of 1927: an emerging African Proletariat', *Rhodesian History* (1971), II, p.65 and C. van Onselen, 'Worker Consciousness in Black Miners in Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1920', *Journal of African History* (1973) XIV, p.237.

tion. Equally significant was the opposition of both white labour and management to any improvement in the status or bargaining position of black workers. This lack of identification between white and black workers resulted in active opposition to black advancement by the white Trade Unions, and was on occasion the actual cause of strikes. Arrighi has commented that it was in the interest of white workers:

to perpetuate those conditions on which their strength was based, that is the lack of (a) a reserve army of white labour, (b) a stable urban African population, and, above all, (c) an effective educational and training system for the Africans . . . Given the lack of a stable African urban population and of adequate Government expenditure on African primary education, it was in all likelihood cheaper for the private employers to import skilled and semi-skilled workers than to train local Africans for skilled positions.¹

In 1918 a Coloured Mechanics and General Workers Union was in existence, but in the face of white opposition to employment of coloured as well as black labour, it cannot be expected that this Union proved effective, as no further reference to it has been found.² Any improvement in black or coloured standards was seen as a threat by the white labour élite, and since the threat was more direct than for example in agriculture, their hostility was perhaps greater than the general white settler opposition to African advancement.

The first white labour movement originated in the building trade in 1910, when building artisans in Salisbury demanded higher wages. This did not result from poor conditions, for Rhodesia was experiencing a boom at the time and builders were much in demand, but employees had discovered that they were being paid on two scales, and demanded that uniformity be enforced at the higher level. The Master Builders Organisation rejected their demands, and the men subsequently met to form a Union.³ A strike by plasterers and bricklayers in Bulawayo in 1912 against attempts to reduce wage levels reflected deteriorating economic conditions, although in this instance they were successful in their demands.⁴ This strike seems to have been a comparatively straight-forward reaction of white labour to managerial efforts to restrict overheads in the economic recession that affected Rhodesia from 1912, and is therefore comparable to the earlier black miners strikes.

Towards the end of 1913, a United Building Trades Trade Union was formed in Bulawayo. Its principal object was opposition to the employment

¹Arrighi, *Political Economy*, p.26.

²R.H. 27.ix.18, letter from the Union.

³R.H. 18.iii.10, 14.x.10, and 28.x.10. No further reports on this Union have been found.

⁴R.H. 29.iii.12.

of coloured labour, and this can similarly be seen as a defensive measure, for the recession of 1912 continued into 1913. While conditions were certainly not serious, it is often the building trades which are first affected by depression, which therefore made the problem of competition between the races of more immediate relevance.¹ Like the Salisbury Union, it is presumed that this Union was fairly inactive; the discontinuation of public works and other building during the war had meant that, unlike other industries, unemployment rates were high in the building industry, a situation not conducive to labour strength.

In 1912 a visiting South African Railway Trade Union leader, Frank Nettleton, persuaded workers at the Umtali headquarters of the Beira and Mashonaland and Rhodesia Railways to form a union. This was actively opposed by the management from its inception, and the chief officials of the union were immediately transferred to small, distant depots, a move which proved successful in breaking the union.²

The first of the great mine strikes in South Africa occurred in 1913, over a demand for recognition of the Union and for an eight-hour day; an event deplored in the Rhodesian press, and probably by most settlers.³ This censure did not encourage workers to follow suit in Rhodesia, where in any case lack of organisation was an equally great bar to industrial unrest. The use of troops by the South African government to protect mine properties and power stations was an incitement for the strike to spread to other industries. Rioting in Johannesburg on the 5th July resulted in the use of cavalry, with police and soldiers firing on the crowds. Over 20 people were killed, including innocent bystanders, but this precipitated a settlement, averted a railway strike, and led to a general resumption of work due to the 'admirable resolution and skill of Generals Botha and J. C. Smuts'.⁴ Considerable ill-feeling was engendered by the strike and its suppression, for workers interpreted government action in an opposite fashion to that of the Governor General, who claimed that the strike had been disorderly and its suppression necessary in view of the possible effect on 'natives':

Absolutely untrue to say troops sent in interests of mine-owners to put down strike, interfere with free speech, and fire on people.

¹In this connection it is interesting to note that a judgment passed in Salisbury in 1914 declared that employers were not guilty of deliberately breaking the law if unable to pay employees. Although this applied to employers of African labour mainly, and therefore the legislation amended was the Native Labour Regulations Amendment Ordinance, No. 1, 1915, on behalf of the commercial community Coghlan criticised this and considered that the more general Masters & Servants Ordinance should rather have been amended. In view of the high bankruptcy rate before and after the war, this must have been of some concern to white labour, and the amendment of this law in 1922 reflected this concern. *B.C.* 4.xii.14.

²*Rhodesian Railway Review*, November 1921, p.11.

³*B.C.* 5.vi. 13, editorial.

⁴Governor General to S. of S., telegram 6.vii.13, Cd. 6941, No. 15.

Action of Government in preventing anarchy was first duty. Their intervention on July 5 . . . cannot be said to be unfavourable to the men.¹

Similar action by the South African government in 1922 was to ensure labour support for responsible government in Rhodesia.

Employers in Rhodesia were naturally concerned at the possible spread of the strike to mines or the railways in Rhodesia, but the Chairman of the Rhodesia Chamber of Mines, Wray, assured members that a railway strike in the country was not anticipated, although it was possible that supplies would be affected on the southern route.² In fact there were no repercussions in Rhodesia, although in October a threatened strike at the Shamva Mine was averted by the prompt action of the management in granting a reduction of working hours from 56 to 50 hours weekly during the hot November to February months, with a guarantee that no Africans would be employed on skilled labour — which they claimed had not been the mine's policy in any case.³ The causes of this strike appear to have been local, and only remotely connected with the Rand strike if at all, other than by the general effect of the growth of trade unionism on all workers. However, this incident was the cause of an investigation by the administration into the possibility of having to cope with more widespread industrial strife, and no doubt some apprehension was aroused when it was reported that:

Every large mine in the territory is the headquarters of a Rifle Company and that in the event of serious trouble arising, it would be quite impossible in the circumstances for the Police, who are inadequate in numbers, to cope with the situation.⁴

It would not therefore be in the administration's interest to allow class opposition to develop to this stage, and this provided yet another cause for the promotion of white worker welfare in Rhodesia. The main risk of future strife was seen to lie in the use of skilled non-white labour,⁵ but although this was to be a feature of the later trade union movement, in fact the militancy of unions from 1919 to 1921 was caused rather by more direct economic factors.

Apprehension in regard to the possible spread of labour unrest to Rhodesia was widespread, as was the view that this would probably arise out of the use of coloured labour. Although no serious labour strife had occurred

¹*Ibid.*, Governor General to S. of S., telegram 13.vii.13, No. 32.

²Minutes, 22.vii.13, RH 2/1/2/2, H.H.Mss.

³Correspondence in RC 3/7/29, 63. The Shamva was owned by the Goldfields Company, and J. G. McDonald was primarily responsible for the settlement.

⁴*Ibid.*, Staff Officer to Commandant General to the Sec., Dept. of Administration, 31.x.13.

⁵*Ibid.*, Newton (Ag. Adminr.) to BSA Co., 11.xi.13.

in Rhodesia, in May 1914, J. W. Sly, President of the Bulawayo Chamber of Commerce commented that the outstanding feature of the year had been the strained relations between capital and labour in commerce throughout the world, adding 'Are we quite sure that we in Rhodesia are free from all industrial problems excepting those connected with native labour?' He foresaw the Asians as the main threat to the community in this regard:

The building trades — through their Trades Unions in Rhodesia — have already refused to recognise the Asiatic as a skilled worker, and quite recently a strike was threatened if certain articles, which had been manufactured in Cape Town by Malay labour, were sent up to Bulawayo and installed in a building then being erected. As a Chamber we cordially support our artisan friends in their endeavours to maintain the European standard in their trades, but I want them to be fair and to also support the European trader in his endeavours towards the same end.¹

By the time war broke out in August 1914, therefore, the trade union movement in Rhodesia was almost non-existent despite widespread union activity in South Africa and elsewhere; the one union in the building trade proved to be non-militant and remained so during the war because of the disadvantageous circumstances, especially the high unemployment rate unique to this trade during the war.² Apart from the question of employment of non-white labour which both white workers and management considered to be the principal cause in present and future strife, conditions for white workers in Rhodesia had not been amenable to the formation of successful white labour movement. The white working class was small, scattered, much in demand, and wages were on average satisfactory.

The war changed the situation, and speeded up the process and growth of Unionism. The immediate cause was the rapid increase in the cost of living, which meant a decline in real wages, while a shortage of white labour resulted from the high enlistment, and thus improved the bargaining position of the remaining men. Employers were thus forced to consider grievances more sympathetically than might otherwise have been the case. Living costs in Rhodesia had always been comparatively higher than in the rest of southern Africa, due to transport charges, the small proportion of foodstuffs produced within the country, and the small consumer population. The Cost of Living Report of July, 1913, mentioned also the adverse effect of discrimination against non-white labour, particularly in the building trade, which meant that construction costs and rents were higher than necessary. The subsequent

¹B.C. 21.v.14, A. G. M. of Byo. Chamber of Commerce.

²B.C. 25.ii.16.

enquiry into high costs in 1921 showed that although the cost of living had declined from a peak in 1920, average household expenses were 23 per cent more than in December 1914, and over 41 per cent above pre-war levels; these figures were considerably lower than expected, and were severely criticised by labour groups and by John Stewart, a Labour member of the Legislative Council.¹ Since these were average figures, they did not reflect the very substantial increases shown in certain individual items, particularly clothing, in a white family's budget.² A separate survey carried out by the Native Department in 1920 showed that the highest increases of all were in 'kaffir truck', and thus for that section of the community that could least afford it.³

These inflationary tendencies did not have an immediate effect in encouraging labour movements, as the question of the war, and the need for co-operation overshadowed personal economic problems. However, the increase in mining production, with a continued distribution of over £500 000 in dividends in 1915 despite the difficulties mines were stated to be experiencing, perhaps helped to stimulate discontent amongst mining employees.⁴ In 1916 further increases were shown in gold and base metal production, while the total amount distributed in dividends exceeded the record figure of 1914.⁵ The prolongation of the war, the apparently healthy state of the mining industry despite war conditions, and the rising cost of living, contributed to the first attempt by mine workers to form a union. The prime mover in this was Herbert Walsh, a boilermaker employed at the Globe and Phoenix Mine, who had been an active Trade Unionist in England and South Africa, where he started the first boilermakers branch of a union at Kimberly in 1902. Walsh was a dedicated Unionist, and the setting up of a Mine Workers Association was no doubt a result of his beliefs, in combination with the apparent proof of the ability of mining groups to improve wages. The Globe and Phoenix was Rhodesia's richest mine,

¹Correspondence in RC 3/1/106, 869.

²Some of the increases were:— clothing — 118.2%; sundries — 75%; food, fuel and light — 36%; balanced by smaller increases in the cost of domestic labour — 20%, insurances and doctors fees — 10%, and rents — 10%.

³Increases were shown as follows:— blankets — 145%, suits — 136%, shirts — 158%, enamelware and domestic utensils — 237%, cloth — 212%, agricultural implements — 159%, and foodstuffs — 115%. Average increases in wages were: mining — 13%, farming — 21%, domestic labour — 21%, see A 3/28/16 and N 3/33/2.

⁴B.C. 1.iv.15, A.G.M. of the R.C.M. There had been a 23% increase in gold production, and dividends totalled £514 800.

⁵B.C. 31.iii.16. Dividends totalled £553 352.

but Walsh's attempt to get the management to improve the working conditions and wages resulted in his eventual dismissal later in the year, despite his good reputation as a workman.

The shortage of skilled labour increased with the duration of the war, and there is evidence to show that some competition existed amongst employers for such skilled labour as remained in the country, as attempts by the Rhodesia Chamber of Mines to fix wage levels proved unsuccessful.¹ There were no further attempts made to form a mine workers union before 1919, but agitations on certain mines in 1917 and 1918 were widespread and resulted in the securing of concessions and higher wages at some of them.² However, a strike at the Cam and Motor Mine near Gatooma resulted in the replacement of the men.³ Demands were generally for increased wages, based on the alleged increased cost of living estimated by the men at 30 per cent and by the management at 15 per cent, for time and a half for overtime, and leave of absence on full pay each year.

The mine owners considered forming an association to combat such demands, but at this time it was considered undesirable by the majority of the members of the R.C.M., who were, however, most indignant over the publication of a letter from the General Secretary of the new Rhodesia Railway Workers Union in the press, inviting mine employees to join the society, since this 'invited trouble at a time when it should be particularly avoided'.⁴

Amongst railway workers there had been a further and more successful attempt to organise a union in 1916. Again, the men might well have been influenced by the sound financial position of their employer, the Beira and Mashonaland and Rhodesia Railway Company, for despite a small deficit in 1915, the balance sheet for 1916 showed a comfortable surplus of almost £200 000 (Table I). The conditions of the railwaymen as described later were poor. Low wages meant that the men were often separated from their families, overtime was unpaid, medical attention was poor, while 'officials showed favouritism in a very marked way and men were often victimised by these officials'.⁵ Salaries were as low as 11/- per day, but even that had been acceptable before the war. Prior to the actual formation of the Rhodesia Railway Workers Union (R.R.W.U.) in September 1916, grievances had been expressed by the men led by Jack Keller, who had been transferred to Wankie in 1913 as a result of his participation in the 1912 union movement. Keller, who had come to Rhodesia in 1912 after the 1911 railway strike in England,

¹Minutes, 19.ix.17 and 19.xii.17, RH 2/1/2/3, H.Mss.

²Ibid., 22.ii.17 (Falcon Mine), 19.xii.17 (Shamva), 21.iii.17 and 14.viii.18 Globe & Phoenix).

³B.C. 8.vi.17.

⁴Minutes, 21.xi.17, RH 2/1/2/3, H.Mss.

⁵Report of a speech by Keller at Wankie, *Rhodesian Railway Review*, January 1934, p.11.

fought first to establish the principle that the Company was responsible for the supply of food to employees under certain circumstances, and later started a campaign for higher wages and payment for Sunday duty. 'With martial law in force organisation was almost impossible, but in spite of all difficulties Jack obtained the signatures of some 120 engine-drivers, firemen and guards to undated resignations from the service'. Despite opposition from the General Manager, E. R. Ross, who had 'broken the Natal strike', concessions followed (J. G. McDonald and A. G. Hay, a Bulawayo auctioneer and members of the Landowners and Farmers Association acting as intermediaries), together with the decision of the men to form a Union.¹

The chief objects of the Union were:

to obtain better working conditions, increased wages, decent hours, and healthier surroundings, to defend members against arbitrary and unjust treatment, to form funds to provide for orphans, and to pay out sick, pension and funeral benefits.²

Of the men who pioneered the R.R.W.U., except for one South African, all were British, and all were veteran trade unionists. The majority had participated in the 1911 strikes in England, and had joined the Beira and Mashonaland and Rhodesia Railways service as a result of a campaign to recruit British railwaymen in 1912.³ Although it was later suspected, there certainly does not appear to have been any political motivation in the formation of the Union; Ross himself negated suggestions in 1917 that the strike in that year was inspired by either the local Responsible Government Association or by South African agitators, and pointed out that it was more likely that the local union was in touch with England.⁴

It had been hoped that the settlement of the railwaymen's grievances in 1916 would ensure no fresh demands for the duration of the war, but in 1917 further strife occurred, centered in Umtali, and caused primarily by the action of the Superintendent of the workshops in dismissing some of the men. Ross believed the world-wide labour developments, and the men's knowledge that they could not easily be replaced, were contributory factors to the superintendent's notorious tactlessness; he went to Umtali hoping to settle the matter by reinstating and transferring the dismissed men, but without conceding to any financial demands. This proved unacceptable to the men,

¹*Ibid.*, June 1917, p.8, and April 1923, p.19.

²*Ibid.*,

³See pen portraits of W. M. Harrison (Liverpool), H. W. Gray (Bristol), W. Myers (Yorkshire), W. P. Chittenden (Guildford), H. Millman (Devon), W. M. Alexander (Scotland), W. Doull (Scotland), J. Stewart (Glasgow), H. Killeen, G. F. Scougal, F. W. Wilson (Cape Town), R. J. Dent (Yorkshire), H. Killeen, G. F. Scougal, W. G. D. Morsman (London), E. J. Lloyd (Manchester), J. H. Hall and D. Payne (all of whom were leading figures in the R.R.W.U.) in *Rhodesian Railway Review*, 1921-1923.

⁴Correspondence in RC 3/1/39, 2387.

and a strike appeared imminent. This however was avoided by agreement on arbitration, suggested by the Resident Commissioner and Chambers of Commerce,¹ although the men's agreement was perhaps secured by the government's action in re-printing the notice of Martial Law 'in view of the existing conditions in the Railway Service',² which pointed out the necessity of complying with military requirements.

A major obstacle to arbitration had been Ross's own attitude, for he considered the situation to be rather a 'trial of strength' between men and management than based on genuine grievances, and in fact favoured a strike.³

The findings of the arbitration board, composed of Justice Ward from the Transvaal, Sir Charles Coghlan (nominated by the R.R.W.U.), and J. G. McDonald (nominated by the management), were made public in February 1918. The men's basic demand for a 25 per cent general increase in pay was disallowed, the Board being unable to agree that such a rise in costs had occurred since the last salary increases, but an increase in the pay of certain artisans from 20/- to 20/6d. was recommended, in addition to an increase in the war bonus to 45/- to married men earning less than £28 per month. A further demand by the men was that all African and coloured men employed 'in the Shops and Machines or Cranes or on work usually done by white men . . . be at once replaced by white labour. That in future no native or coloured man is to be employed on any work to the detriment of white men', and this was settled by an assurance from Ross that the cases referred to were exceptional, and that the management had no intention of displacing white by coloured labour.⁴

It had previously been agreed that the findings of the Board would be binding on both sides for 12 months, thereafter six months notice to be given of change, and peace ensued on the railways in 1918. However, the considerable increase in the cost of living during 1919 resulted in complaints and a demand for a commission of enquiry, which was appointed in April 1919. The findings of this commission had not been announced by the 10th July, when the men at Bulawayo threatened to strike in protest unless its findings were immediately made public. A two day strike resulted, the men demanding an increase in war bonuses to the considerably higher level paid in South Africa.⁵ The prompt action of the management in meeting their demands to

¹Minutes, 26.x.17, SA 5/1/4, H.Mss., and correspondence in RC 3/1/39, 2387.

²R.H. 26.x.17.

³R.Comm. to H.Com., 25.x.17, RC 3/1/40, 2458.

⁴R.H. 19.ii.18, Report of Arbitration Board, and Pr.Sec. to R.Comm. to Imperial Secretary, 28.ii.18, RC 3/1/47, 373. See also 'Petition by all grades in all Districts on the Beira & Mashonaland & Rhodesia Railways in RC 3/1/39, 2387, in which in addition to the levelling up of certain grades, a 25% general increase was demanded, with a minimum wage of £1 per day.

⁵R.H. 12.vii.19, reports of meetings.

considerable extent ended the strike; the war bonus was increased to £6.10.0d. for married men, and extended to single men and apprentices.¹ All coloured and Asian labour was excepted from these increased awards, and received the lower increases recommended by the Railways Commission previously appointed.² The more conciliatory attitude shown by the Railway management was largely due to a change in Director, C. F. Birney having replaced Ross in 1918, but it was also an acknowledgement of the justness of the men's demands.³

Despite the fact that the R.R.W.U. was openly racist in its objectives, and opposed the use of skilled non-white labour, this strike was accompanied by a strike of African labour employed by the railways at Bulawayo. Although no increase was made to basic pay, those who had been employed in excess of one year were offered an additional monthly bonus, varying according to length of service. This was reported to have satisfied the men, who had demanded a basic wage of 5/- per day, or £7.10.0d. per month.⁴ It is unlikely that there was any co-operation with the organisers of the R.R.W.U. strike, but this certainly reflected an awareness of the effectiveness of the strike weapon, and was probably similarly inspired by the increased cost of living. That the discontent over inflated prices was general is indicated in the reports of Native Commissioners in 1919; the Native Commissioner for Lomagundi commented in addition that 'undoubtedly some of the younger generation are acquiring ideas on the questions of employers and employment which were unknown until recently'.⁵ It was also reported that the strike of the railway's African employees had stimulated a similar movement among employees of the Bulawayo Municipal Council, but 'in each instance the strike, if strike it may be called, was short-lived and of no immediate importance'.⁶

However, Bulawayo appears to have been the only centre where white strikes stimulated similar movements by Africans; the later strike of miners at Wankie had no apparent effect on African labour employed at the colliery,⁷ although there had been a strike by African workers at Wankie in 1912.⁸ It is possible that minor or threatened strikes occurred in the Umtali district, as the Native Commissioner reported that:

¹R.H. 14.vii.19. £7.10.0d. had been demanded; bonuses of £2.10.0d., and £1.5.0d. were made to single men and apprentices.

²R.H. 16.vii.19.

³Ross had initially turned a blind eye to his Directors' suggestions that he agree to arbitration in 1917, R.Comm. to H.Comm., 25.x.17, RC 3/1/40, 2458.

⁴B.C. 18.vii.19.

⁵Annual Report, 1919, N 9/1/22. Native Commissioners do not appear to have been aware of the earlier strikes.

⁶Annual Report of the Superintendent of Natives, Bulawayo, 1919, N 9/1/22.

⁷Ibid., Native Commissioner, Wankie, Annual Report, 1919.

⁸J. M. MacKenzie, 'African Labour in South Central Africa, 1890-1914, and Nineteenth Century Colonial Labour Theory', Univ. of British Columbia, unpub. Ph.D. thesis, 1969, p.225.

Portents have not been lacking that the demand for increased wages on the part of Europeans culminating in success where strikes are resorted to, are not without their influence and reaction upon the native labourers. The latter through the unavoidable incidence of their and the European's working relative conditions and the close association which often results, are conversant with the white man's methods of combating the increased cost of commodities, yet when he attempts to imitate them he finds he is liable to be dealt with criminally. Moreover the Native is often thrown out of work when European overseer strikes and so suffers loss of wages while the European gains. He is left without means of effectually representing his claims and abstract justice is simply conveniently denied him. These unhappy conditions must inevitably result in fostering general and dangerous discontent . . . As the natives are not permitted to resort to agitation to gain what they consider to be their rights in this respect, a medium for the fair and effective representation of their claims with power to remedy their just grievances when ascertained, should be provided as an act of grace.¹

The experiences on which the cautious attitude of African labour were based are unfortunately apparently unrecorded, but must have been widespread. It is apparent from the railway strike that one difficulty was in ascertaining the men's grievances. They were reported to be afraid of victimisation, and refused to appoint a deputation for talks with the management, for fear of being summarily dealt with; talks were eventually held only after twice being reassured by the Manager that this would not be the case.² This leniency appears to have been an exception to the rule, for a further strike by municipal workers in Bulawayo in 1921 resulted in heavy fines and imprisonment for the offenders.³

The industrial strife on the railways had been preceded by the formation of the Rhodesian Mine and General Workers Association (R.M.G.W.A.) by Herbert Walsh in June 1919. The principal objects of this association were a 48-hour week, up to 20 per cent increases in pay, two weeks paid annual leave, state supervision of mines and factories, a tax on unoccupied land, the introduction of super tax, and the nationalisation of the railways.⁴ As in 1916 (and as with the railways) the financial position of the mining industry had previously been shown to be sound; dividends of over 82 per cent were paid by the Globe and Phoenix Mine, 20 per cent by the Rezende, 30 per cent by the Lonely, and 15 per cent by the Eldorado, Shamva and Wankie mines,

¹Annual Report of the Native Commissioner, Umtali, 1919, N 9/1/22.

²B.C. 12.vii.19 and 14.vii.19.

³B.C. 29.i.21.

⁴B.C. 6.vi.19.

the major mines in the country.¹ The Resident Commissioner reported at the weekend of the year that Walsh,

a very expert workman . . . possessing considerable acumen . . . has busily engaged in establishing branches of his Association on the larger mining properties in the territory. At the outset, although it was anticipated that trouble would sooner or later arise, his machinations were not . . . taken seriously by the managements of the mines concerned. Lately however, the increasing number of branches of the Association which were being established, caused some uneasiness and in some cases, agreements, regarding shorter hours of work and increases of pay, were arrived at on some of the mines by employers and employees.²

The movement had been discussed by the Rhodesia Chamber of Mines in August, when Theo Haddon of the Globe and Phoenix suggested co-operation between mine managers to deal with the matter. This was thought to be premature, however, and Colonel Heyman recommended that the wages of white mine workers be settled on similar lines to the government's proposed ten per cent increase in response to Civil Service demands, such increase to take the form of a bonus.³

No action was taken on this recommendation, and in September, when the R.M.G.W.A. suggested that the R.C.M. represent the mining companies in a conference with the Association's executive to discuss wages and other conditions, the Chamber declined the invitation, claiming that it had no power to bind its members in any way in regard to such matters.⁴ At its suggestion the R.M.G.W.A. then approached the mines directly in November; demands were made to the Goldfields Company, and the Rezende and Wankie mines, for a 25 per cent wage increase, and a 48-hour week. Again the R.C.M. decided that 'the wisest course was to let matters remain as they are and that each individual Company should act as it thought fit'.⁵ Possibly it was hoped to undermine the Association's influence by promoting separate negotiations on the mines concerned, but the R.M.G.W. refused to sanction such individual actions, and insisted on general acceptance of its overall demands. The men at Wankie came to agreement with their company, while it was claimed that at Rezende the men resented having to refuse the generous terms offered, which, as recommended by the R.C.M., took the form of a

¹B.C. 28.ii.19. Despite this, there was a slight decrease in gold production which the R.C.M. attributed to increased labour and other costs, A.G.M., B.C. 28.iii.19.

²R.Comm. to H.Comm., 23.xii.19, RC 3/1/81, 2034.

³Minutes, 20.viii.19, RH 2/1/2/4, H.Mss.

⁴Ibid., 25.ix.19. The Chambers of Commerce on the other hand had no such scruples,

⁵Ibid., 18.xi.19 and 5.xii.19.

temporary bonus in addition to a ten per cent increase.¹ After an abortive conference with the Goldfields group and the Wankie Company, which the Rezende management refused to attend, on the 11th December the Rezende men came out on strike, followed by the Wankie Colliery, the Shamva, Gaika and Falcon mines, with the co-operation of the R.R. W.U. who refused to carry coal for delivery at the affected mines or remove coal from Wankie.

The unity was not long-lived. The Association's insistence on unanimity brought hostile criticism from the press, which claimed that the strike was unnecessary since the Wankie and Rezende men were satisfied with the terms offered; such criticism perhaps helped to weaken the R.M.G.W.A.'s case, and alienated sympathy from it. Walsh's attempt to justify the Association's action from the accusation that the strike was a 'senseless piece of folly or tyranny, wholly indefensible and inexplicable except on the assumption that the one aim of the leaders is to establish a dictatorship, a sort of glorified Soviet in Bulawayo'² made little impact on editorial policy. An account from the union's branch covering Rezende of the history of the case, which showed that accounts of the management's generosity were misleading, as no increases had been made at the mine since 1907,³ was also without influence. Support from Rezende men in correspondence columns for the R.M.G.W.A. indicated that they were not as contented with the terms offered as had been claimed, and it is therefore possible that such intimations were deliberately intended to make the Association appear responsible for an apparently unreasonable and intransigent attitude.

The strike was settled on Christmas Day; each mine came to an independent agreement with its management, but on the basis of the terms requested by the R.M.G.W.A. The Resident Commissioner reported:

I am inclined to think that had the question of better rates of pay been sympathetically considered by the mine managements concerned at an earlier date, the strike might have been avoided. The men can claim that until they combined no steps were taken, except on one or two mines, to help them to meet the increased cost of living, and therefore the formation of an association has been fully justified.⁴

Employers had been forced to consider the men's grievances by the strike, and were obliged to make more realistic concessions against the rapidly rising cost of living. Their action included further consideration of means of reducing the high costs by way of guaranteeing storekeepers accounts on certain mine

¹*R.H.* 16.xii.19.

²*R.H.* 22.xii.19, editorial.

³*Ibid.*, letters from Walsh and G. McKellar, President of the Penhalonga Branch, R.M.G.W.A. It is interesting to note that Coghlan was a Director of Rezende Mines Limited, Minutes of meeting, *R.H.* 27.v.21.

⁴*R.Comm.* to *H.Comm.*, 17.i.20, RC 3/1/82, 17.

properties, which was expected to make a saving of between ten and 15 per cent for the men.¹ Agreement was also reached by members of the R.C.M., however, that in the event of future strife, members would act in unison against further demands.

Until late 1919, the R.M.G.W.A. was the only union in Rhodesia representing general workers in Rhodesia, other than the specialised building, railway and civil service unions. Conflict was introduced when a plethora of crafts unions sprang up, in particular the formation of a branch of the Transvaal Amalgamated Society of Engineers in Bulawayo in December 1919.² The possibilities of division were immediately obvious:

It is clear that this introduces a new element into our local labour organisation, which has hitherto been working on strictly territorial lines. Though we are assured that there will be no attempt at dictation from the South in Rhodesian labour matters, it will be observed that, in the words of one of the delegates from the Transvaal who came up to establish this and other branches of the A.S.E. they 'could not agree to any affiliation of their members with any other unions except on a voluntary or honorary basis and even then, the A.S.E. must be the first consideration'.³

It was feared that in fact South African unions, who had remained aloof from labour affairs in Rhodesia due to their belief that the numbers employed were too small to warrant successful branches of the craft unions existing in the South, but who now established this first branch, possibly as a result of the growing success of the Rhodesian union movement, would now attempt to dictate to Rhodesia, or at any rate offer advice so that:

any labour dispute in this territory will be dealt with, not merely on its own merits, but in accordance with the advice and certainly with the assistance, of an organisation situated outside Rhodesia . . . it destroys independence of action.⁴

Although this aspect did not prove to be ultimately significant, in fact the division that was introduced, particularly in the ranks of the R.M.G.W.A., was to contribute substantially to the decline of the union movement.

Earlier in 1919, a Commercial Employees Association had been formed after a meeting of shop assistants, warehousemen and clerks in Salisbury in March. The usually co-operative attitude of the Salisbury Chamber of Com-

¹Minutes, 18.ii.20, RH 2/1/2/4, H.Mss.

²Known initially as the A.S.E., Amalgamated Society of Engineers, it was subsequently called the Amalgamated Engineering Union, or A.E.U.

³B.C. 12.xii.19, editorial.

⁴*Ibid.*

merce, in addition to the decision of the Association to work in harmony with employers, meant that the C.E.A. was comparatively non-militant.¹ The Chamber of Commerce tended to be more sympathetic to labour movements than other employer organisations; for example in connection with the postal strike of 1920 they commented that:

In their opinion had a more frank disposition been shewn earlier to meet the men's demands, this most regrettable impasse could and should have been avoided. This Chamber desires to remind the Administration that for many years grievances have existed in this department which call for remedy but apparently they were treated with little consideration.²

In March 1920 they agreed to meet representatives of the C.E.A. in regard to demands for increased pay (these demands appear to have been made as a result of criticism of the Association by its members for lack of achievement).³ The Chamber commented favourably on the able and moderate way in which C.E.A. delegates proved their case, and urged all members to investigate wages 'with a view to increasing same commensurate with the cost of living in 1914'.⁴ This considerate attitude did not survive the C.E.A.'s castigation of the trading community for the high cost of living in April 1920, which was felt to have 'cast a slur upon the commercial community', and the Chamber demanded that the C.E.A. correct its mis-statements and stated that it 'would cease to recognise the Association unless the members could adopt a more reasonable attitude'.⁵ The introduction of a Shop Hours Ordinance by the C.E.A. in 1920 was also strongly opposed the Associated Chambers of Commerce, and was subsequently withdrawn in view of further opposition by the Rhodesia Chamber of Mines.⁶ However, the bill, re-drafted by the C.E.A. in accordance with suggestions from both the Associated Chambers of Commerce and the R.C.M., proved acceptable in 1921.

The one achievement of the C.E.A. was the Shop Hours Ordinance, for their second object appears to have been to break into municipal politics, and in this they were foiled by the system of voting, based on property, which effectively excluded labour candidates.⁷ The candidate supported by the C.E.A. in 1920 was John Stewart, a member of the Legislative Council and also of the R.R.W.U., who attracted the largest number of individual voters but failed to be returned as his supporters had only approximately two

¹*B.C.* 21.iii.19.

²Minutes, 23.ii.20, SA 5/1/4, H. Mss.

³*R.H.* 24.ii.20, A.G.M. of the C.E.A.

⁴Minutes, 15.iii.20 and 29.iii.20, SA 5/1/4, H. Mss. See also *R.H.* 2.iii.20.

⁵Minutes, 28.iv.20, SA 5/1/4, H. Mss.

⁶Minutes, 24.vi.20, RH 2/1/2/4, H.Mss., and Minutes, 28.vi.20, SA 13/1/3.

⁷*Vigil* (Journal of the C.E.A.) Vol. 1, No. 3, August 1921, p.1-2. The value of property determined the number of votes allocated.

votes each, while the candidate attracting the lowest number of individual voters (75) polled a total of 405 votes to Stewart's 267. Stewart stood again in 1921 with several other Labour candidates, including Charles Olley, Secretary of the C.E.A., but withdrew in protest against the system of voting.¹ They had previously secured the resignation of Elcombe from the Council, after exposing details of his contract with the Council of coal and transport services without tender, but Elcombe was subsequently elected Mayor,² and at a small meeting of ratepayers it was decided to retain the system of voting.³ Municipal finances were sound, and members of the Council were 'business-men who understand the requirements of the town far better than any group of amateurs could possibly do.'⁴

The various commercial employees associations in Rhodesia were amalgamated in 1921, with the exception of the Bulawayo Association, which was thought to be almost defunct. They maintained their continued desire to improve relations with employers, but in fact the Amalgamated Commercial Employees Association was not long to survive the Bulawayo group, and with most other unions in Rhodesia, disintegrated in 1923.

The prevailing atmosphere of labour discontent continued into 1920, and resulted in a delay by the administration in repealing Martial Law, which the Administrator admitted was due to the prospect of further strife on the railways, and in the Posts and Telegraphs Department; a move the Resident Commissioner described as 'inherently bad' and a 'prostitution of the powers which it is usually desired to obtain by the imposition of Martial Law.'⁵ New demands had been made by the R.R.W.U. on the expiry of the July 1919 agreement, which coincided with similar demands by railwaymen in South Africa. They demanded an eight hour day, 44-hour week, increase in the war bonus, and a 33½ per cent increase on gross pay including bonus. A two week strike followed from mid-March, and agreement was finally reached on an increase of 25 per cent in substantive pay.⁶

This strike was preceded by that of Postal and Telegraphic officials, who on the 6th February had demanded to be placed on the same footing regarding pay and conditions as the rest of the civil service, with a 15 per cent increase in pay in addition to the ten per cent granted in August 1919. No reply was received from the administration, and a strike ensued on the 20th February, with assistance from the railwaymen who refused to handle mail. Considerable inconvenience was caused to the entire community, but the

¹*R.H.* 5.viii.21.

²*R.H.* 12.viii.21.

³*R.H.* 19.viii.21.

⁴*R.H.* 16.ix.21, editorial.

⁵*R. Comm.* to *H.Comm.*, 5.ii.20, *RC* 3/1/83, 135.

⁶Full details of the settlement can be found in *R.H.* 30.iii.20.

Chambers of Commerce and public meetings condemned the dilatory action of government in handling the Posts and Telegraphs Association's complaints. Thus forced into action, concessions were conceded by the administration, and work resumed after five days.¹

Further concessions were also made to the Civil Service as a whole, averaging ten per cent on salaries below £1 000 per annum,² in response to demands made by the Southern Rhodesia Public Services Association, and revisions were also made to the non-pensionable marriage and childrens allowances.³ The discontent in the civil service was strongly resented by the government's senior officials, particularly the direct approach to the High Commissioner by the Public Services Association.⁴ The administrator took great exception to the Association's activities during the postal strike, during which they recommended members not to assist with postal duties.⁵ The most serious aspect of the civil service discontent, however, was that members of the Police force were similarly disaffected, and joined the strike on the 23rd February. Representations had first been made by the police to the administration in August 1919; the delay in reply, attributed later by Chaplin to the absence of the Commandant General, added to the discontent.⁶ All members of the Town Police and several in the districts joined the strike, which was limited, however, to the more recent recruits in the force, although actively encouraged by long-service men. The strike ended on the 26th February, and a settlement was reached on the 6th March; the Commandant General sagely refused to treat the matter as a mutiny.⁷

The two main developments after the strike in February and March 1920 were the increasing conflict between the R.M.G.W.A. and the Amalgamated Engineering Union, and the formation of a Labour Party after the elections in September, the progress of which was seriously affected by the lack of unity in the labour ranks. Despite rumours of a further railway strike in September, which arose out of the demand of the R.R.W.U. that members of the Amalgamated Engineering Union employed on the railways join the

¹See correspondence in A 3/23/13 and RC 3/1/84, 189, 253. Minutes, 23.ii.20, SA 5/1/4, H.Mss. Details of wage structures can be seen in R.H. 20.ii.20 and 21.ii.20. It is interesting to note that the Responsible Government Association requested Coghlan to mediate in the dispute, but he refused to do so in his capacity as Chairman of a political party, but stated that he would consider doing so as Leader of the Elected Members, R.H. 24.ii.20 and 25.ii.20.

²R.H. 25.ii.20, and Treasury Circular No. 5, 1920, 26.ii.20, RC 3/1/84, 253.

³The Southern Rhodesia Public Service Association was founded in June 1919, to which the earlier Rhodesia Teachers Association and Posts & Telegraphs Association became affiliated; it was formed mainly because of the expected change in government as well as for the protection of general interests. After formal recognition by the Government in 1920, headquarters were moved from Bulawayo to Salisbury. See SR 1/1/1, H. Mss.

⁴See correspondence in A 3/7/21/1.

⁵Meeting between Chaplin and Public Services Assn., 20.iv.20. A 3/7/21/3.

⁶Chaplin to Gell, 27.ii.20, CH 8/2/2/6, H.Mss.

⁷R.Com. to H. Com., 12.iii.20, RC 3/1/84, 271.

railway union, the men were reported to be disregarding the call of their executive. It was considered that Walsh was to blame for the situation, and that he and the 'extremist' leaders of the R.R.W.U. were attempting to dictate to the men in order to ensure that all employees in the country belonged either to the R.R.W.U. or R.M.G.W.A.

The Labour Party's executive reflected the split in labour opinion, for Walsh was not a member, while the General Secretary, F. L. Hadfield had actively opposed the two major unions' attempts to force members of the Engineering Union to join their ranks.¹ It was asserted that Walsh had in fact not been considered for a post, or alternatively lacked interest in the Party since he had not been offered the presidency. Walsh was obliged to write and defend his name; he maintained that although he had been offered an executive post, he had refused it in view of his opposition to the structure of the Party and its aims, and claimed also that the press misled the public as to his 'extremism'.² The opposition of the two main trade unions to the Party resulted in the resignation of Hadfield as Secretary in January 1921, in the hope that the Party would thus be saved. It did not long survive Hadfield's resignation, but was revived in 1922, in a form similar to that of the Labour Party in England, in order to participate in the Referendum and subsequent elections.

Although the problems arising in the Labour movement were not at this stage insurmountable, further demands by the R.M.G.W.A. on behalf of mining employees in November 1920 resulted in the decision of mining companies to form the Rhodesian Mine Owners Association, in which J. G. McDonald was the leading figure. This development, together with changing economic circumstances from 1921, was to mean the collapse of the Rhodesian Labour movement. McDonald claimed that the demands made by the R.M.G.W.A. and Amalgamated Engineering Union were unreasonable 'narrow and selfish', and which in view of the fall in the gold premium would cripple the mining industry.³ In fact early in 1921 an increase in the total amount distributed in dividends to over £1 000 000 was announced, and attributed to an increase in the gold premium; the Globe and Phoenix paid a dividend of 114½ per cent, the Lonely 95 per cent, Rezende 40 per cent, Shamva 30 per cent, and Wankie 15 per cent.⁴ The Mine Owners were prepared to offer concessions on certain points, such as an eight hour day 'where practicable', but they disagreed with the statistics on which the men's demands

¹B.C. 8.i.21. Hadfield, a former missionary, was also a Labour/Responsible Government Association member of the Legislative Council.

²R.H. 17.ix.20, letter from Walsh. He had been described as bitter and twisted about his defeat in the Legislative Council election, and as seeing himself as a 'Rhodesian Lenin', R.H. 10.ix.20.

³R.H. 26.ix.20 and B.C. 22.i.21.

⁴B.C. 12.ii.21.

were based, and refused to increase overall shift scales.¹ The press once again gave its support to the criticism of Walsh and the Unions by intimating that Union officials were visiting mines in order to stir up discontent, and disputing figures quoted by Walsh for Wankie Colliery. Walsh attempted once more to defend his own and the Union's name, for apparently such officials were merely returning to their places of employment after a meeting in Bulawayo, while his figures for Wankie came from Thompson, the General Manager.² The press campaign did not abate, however, and the Mine Owners refused to attend a conference proposed by the R.M.G.W.A. Instead they formulated a plan to deal with any strike, which was put into action over a strike threat at the Shamva Mine by members of the R.M.G.W.A. who refused to work with two Amalgamated Engineering Union men, in February 1921. An ultimatum was issued to the Unions which required Union recognition of the right of mine employers to employ men as they saw fit; unless their agreement to this was secured, it was threatened to fire all R.M.G.W.A. men.³

The strike was proceeded with, however, by all employees at Shamva, the initial cause forgotten in the co-operation of the Unions against the ultimatum. A further strike followed at Wankie, where again the two Unions were united against the action of the management in firing a member of the Engineering Union for refusing to fix a car driven by a coloured employee.⁴ The Mine Owners refused to refer the issue to a Conciliation Board, and counteracted the strikes that followed at the majority of the mines with lock-outs, but denied Walsh's accusations that they were attempting to break the Unions. They then proceeded to utilise the divisions between the two unions by negotiating with the Amalgamated Engineering Union, which instructed its members to return to work, but refused to consider Walsh's approaches in regarding to a settlement. This re-united the unions temporarily, and despite John Stewart's attempts at mediation, the Mine Owners then stood firm for an unconditional acceptance of their ultimatum before negotiations could commence. Finally forced into agreement, work resumed on the mines on the 16th March, and a subsequent conference confirmed the Mine Owners in a position of strength, for recognition was made of their right to employ suitable men, and it was agreed that all local differences were to be settled between mine managements and local Union Branches. The Unions further agreed that no stoppages over labour disputes would take place until full enquiries had been held.⁵ This defeat of the Unions contributed to a decline in their

¹Minutes, 2.xii.20 and 4.xii.20, RH 3/1, H. Mss.

²B.C. 29.i.21.

³Minutes, 19.ii.21, RH 3/1, H.Mss. Moffat was the only dissident to the resolution.

⁴Ibid., 26.ii.21.

⁵Ibid., 9.iii.21.

strength, and dissatisfaction with the R.M.G.W.A. in particular was reported later in the year.¹

Diminishing support contributed to the decision of the R.M.G.W.A. to join the South African Mine Workers Union, of which it became a branch in September 1921, for, as Walsh explained, 'the R.M.G.W.A. had been unable to withstand the attack of the Rhodesian Mine Owners'.² Walsh's first principle for successful trade unionism in Rhodesia had been unity within one general workers movement; this had been destroyed by the formation of the Amalgamated Engineering Union which divided mine and railway workers, and enabled employers to play the unions off against each other, in this instance supporting the smaller Engineering Union against the stronger, more vociferous R.M.G.W.A. Economic circumstances had further materially altered the prospects of unions, for the earlier spiralling cost of living collapsed, prices started falling, and by December 1921, the Mine Owners Association was able to suggest wage reductions commensurate with this, following the example of mines on the Rand.³

Accordingly, in January 1922 reductions of 12 per cent in shift rates were notified. The Mine Owners rejected an attempt by the R.M.G.W.A. to limit this to six per cent, but agreed to hold a conference with the Association. This was held early in March, but proved abortive, for the Mine Owners were in a position of strength, which was assisted by the news of the deteriorating situation on the Rand, where the miners strike erupted into violence with the use of force by the government against strikers.⁴ The emotionalism aroused by this was an undoubted advantage to the Mine Owners, for it pointed to the extremism of South African labour; considerable coverage was given to the 'Bolshevik' sympathies of the strike leaders.⁵

However, the altered economic conditions were the prime cause of the Mine Owners' strength, for unemployment figures had soared over the year, from 119 in Bulawayo in July 1921, to 262 in January 1922. The shortage of white labour, a significant factor in the rise of white trade unionism, was now a thing of the past, and the situation continued to deteriorate throughout 1922 and 1923, despite relief measures by the Rhodesian Chamber of Mines and the government.⁶

¹*B.C.* 16.vii.21.

²*Vigil*, Vol. 1, No. 4, September 1921, p.8, and *R.H.* 15.vii.21.

³Minutes, 22.xii.21, RH 3/1, H.Mss.

⁴See correspondence in B 2/2/10.

⁵*B.C.* 18.iii.22.

⁶*B.C.* 7.i.22, and correspondence in A 3/28/81. An unemployment agency was established by the R.C.M. in June 1921 and taken over by the government in 1923, Minutes, 26.vii.23, RH 2/1/2/4, H.Mss.

The Rhodesian Mine Owners Association had thus been established at a period when labour strength was at its height, but circumstances were no longer favourable to the Unions from mid-1921, and the united action and determination of the Mine Owners to combat white unionism coincided with a period during which depression and unemployment would have reduced the power of the Unions without their assistance. The division between the Unions might not have proved fatal despite the economic changes, but exploitation of this by the Mine Owners proved a further factor in the destruction of the R.M.G.W.A. in particular. By March 1923, the mining unions were said to be defunct, and further wage reductions were put into effect,¹ although the Amalgamated Engineering Union in fact continued its precarious and ineffectual existence until 1926.

The R.M.G.W.A. had succeeded in improving wages and conditions for both members and non-members during its three year existence, and in a later outline of its history, its failure was partially blamed on poor membership despite use by non-members; the Union had acted on behalf of employees at the Bulawayo Waterworks and Electric Light Company, Salisbury plumbers, and other groups, with no benefit in increased membership or fees. Principally, however, it was thought to have fallen 'prey to the desire for sectional organisation on the part of the mechanics working on the Mines'.² Although Walsh claimed that his closure of the Association in 1923 was a deliberate reaction to this 'sectionalism', it was undoubtedly the increasing impotency of the Association in the face of economic circumstances and the associated increase in strength of the Mine Owners that mainly contributed to its decline.

The rise and fall of white trade unionism in Southern Rhodesia can thus be seen to be linked to the war, and the inflation which followed it. Before 1914, white labour had either been satisfied with existing wage rates and conditions, which were superior to those in England or South Africa (the R.C.M. claimed to pay on average ten per cent above Rand levels), or, in the case of the railways were unable to combine in the face of strong opposition from employers. The rise in the cost of living during the war, with the acute white labour shortage, together precipitated militancy, especially as the financial condition of mining employers and the Beira and Mashonaland and Rhodesia Railways (although not in the building trade) could clearly be seen to be able to bear the cost of improving wage standards. The failure of employers to make any effort to ease increasing financial hardship as a result of the increased costs, or to meet the men's initial demands, further ensured the growth of active trade unionism. Inflation in 1919 and 1920 was met with

¹Minutes, 29.iii.23, RH 3/1, H.Mss. It was rumoured later in the year that Walsh was attempting to resuscitate the R.M.G.W.A., and on the 18.viii.23 the Mine Owners resolved not to deal with him should he be successful, 'in view of his past conduct'.

²*Rhodesian Railway Review*, No. 160, December 1934, p.39.

a similar lack of voluntary response from employers, and this period saw the zenith of the Union movement and the formation of a Labour Party. Despite the return of men from active service, conditions were still favourable to the movement; the R.C.M. reported in December 1920 that the skilled white labour situation was 'inadequate', with semi-skilled labour only 'fairly satisfactory'.¹

By mid 1921, however, this situation was reversed, and unemployment became a serious problem despite the fact that immigration of unskilled men was actively discouraged, and destitutes were paid to leave the country. The decision of mine owners to combine against white labour demands occurred at a time when the economic situation was already changing, making the prospects of their success bright. The formation of the Rhodesian Mine Owners Association, its use of the conflict between the Engineering Union and the R.M.G.W.A., the depression and unemployment, therefore, saw the ultimate closure of the most active mining union early in 1923. The R.R.W.U. on the other hand managed to survive, which can be attributed to its lack of internal division, while having a more centralised work force from which to draw members. By 1922 conditions for militancy had passed; the next dispute occurred only in 1927 over accusations of victimisation and for reinstatement of the £3 per month taken from substantive pay in 1922. The Commission appointed to enquire into the dispute awarded the men an increase of approximately half the amount claimed, but refuted most of their demands and charges.²

The R.R.W.U. appears to have been the only union to remain active after 1922, for although the Building Trades Trade Union survived, no evidence has been found to indicate any degree of militancy, and its survival is perhaps surprising in view of this and the depression of the 1930s. The Commercial Employees Association, like the R.M.G.W.A., had a brief career despite the more amenable attitude of commercial employers; its purpose and energy were spent after the passing of the 1921 Shop Hours Ordinance, and with the end of inflation. Trade unionism throughout the world suffered a check with the depression, which was sufficient to strangle the infant movement in Rhodesia.

The failure of an African labour movement to emerge despite use of the strike weapon from as early as 1895³ can be attributed to several causes,

¹Minutes, 30.xii.20, RH 2/1/2/3, H.Mss.

²*Interim Report of the Commission appointed to enquire into Certain Matters in dispute between the Beira & Mashonaland & Rhodesia Railways and the employees of the said Railways*, C.S.R.4, 1928, and *Second and Final Report of the Commission*, C.S.R.12, 1928. A further railway strike occurred in 1929.

³Many works on Rhodesian history do not mention the use of strikes by African employees, for example, Gann, p.226, comments in connection with the strikes of 1919-21 that 'Africans did not join the fray'.

of which control by employers and by the means of the Pass Laws is perhaps the most relevant. During the period after 1916, when white unionism emerged, supplies of black labour were plentiful, an additional impediment to organisation. Although Africans were more seriously affected by inflation after 1918, they were also faced with a more concerted and united opposition than was the case with white labour, which united with employers to oppose any advance of non-white employees. Whereas employers were interested in keeping over-heads such as African wages to a minimum, white workers were concerned with the maintenance of their privileged status within the country, which required that Africans stay at an unskilled level rather than become a source of competition. As van Onselen has stated, '... the combination of managerial power in the compounds and state power outside was sufficient to militate against the development of aggressive worker responses'.¹

The white labour movement on the other hand had initially received considerable public support and sympathy, for the entire community suffered from the effects of inflation, and the demands made were seen to be not unreasonable. Employers rather than employees were at first condemned; this support can also be seen in the return of Labour members to the Legislative Council in 1920, and the membership of non-working class men such as the missionary Hadfield in the first Labour Party. Arrighi has demonstrated the compatability of the white working class with the white rural and petty bourgeoisie interests from both a political and economic point of view,² and it was this coalition against international capitalism in the shape of the BSA Company, and the railway and mining companies, that was to result in the success of the responsible government movement in 1920 and 1922. This partnership suffered a setback as a result of the rioting and casualties of the Rand strike, as concern was created over the possible link of trade unionism with communism, even in Rhodesia. Consequently sympathy for the trade unionists declined, and this resulted in a later split between the second Labour Party and the Rhodesian Party (a successor to the Responsible Government Association).

¹C. van Onselen, draft paper on the 1912 Wankie Mine Strike. An interesting analysis of white attitudes can also be found in F. A. Johnstone, 'White Prosperity and White Supremacy in South Africa Today', *African Affairs*, (1970) LXIX, p.124.

²Arrighi, *Political Economy*, p.29. This is borne out by suggestions for an alliance with railway workers by the Makoni Farmers Association, B.C. 4.ii.22, and a statement by Noaks, Sec. of the R.A.U., regarding co-operation between farmers and labour, B.C. 18.ii.22.



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